

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

CONSULTATION PAPER

Purpose

This Consultation Paper asks a series of questions to inform the development of AusAID's Civil Society Engagement Framework (Framework).

The Framework will provide a clear outline of AusAID's support for civil society and the objectives of this support. It will provide AusAID with clear parameters to assess, design, monitor and evaluate its civil society engagement, and will inform the development of future strategic and program level guidance.

The consultation process is designed to ensure the Framework accurately reflects AusAID's engagement with civil society, is articulated in a clear and comprehensive way to key stakeholders of the aid program, and is consistent with Australian Government policies.

Introduction

The importance of a strong and vibrant civil society is well recognised by the Australian Government. The Government is committed to strengthening and widening the range of civil society stakeholders engaged with the aid program in support of the Millennium Development Goals and effective development. International, partner country and Australian civil society organisations complement and reinforce the work of bilateral and multilateral development actors, and play many critical roles including to:

- promote a strong, active, effective and accountable civil society to participate in development;
- promote support for international development issues in the Australian community;
- improve access to sustainable livelihoods and vital services including health, education and water;
- mediate between partner governments and communities in fragile states and in post-conflict, humanitarian and emergency crises;
- promote human rights especially of the most vulnerable and marginalised (women, children, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and refugees);
- participate in and disseminate, international development policy dialogue, research and analysis;
- promote transparency, accountability and responsiveness of partner governments to the poor; and
- extend the reach of, and complement donor, government and multilateral assistance programs.

Reflecting the importance and diversity of civil society's roles in development, the Australian Government supports non-government and community organisations in more than 30 of AusAID's country-based, regional, and thematic programs. AusAID also provides opportunities for Australian development non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society partners to contribute to policy, program and strategy development. Increasingly AusAID is working through partnership arrangements with civil society organisations, such as the recent partnership with the Australian Council for International Development, the peak body for Australian international development NGOs.

Despite the breadth of AusAID's engagement with civil society, there is currently no document which outlines the principles underlying this engagement. In view of this, AusAID is developing a Civil Society Engagement Framework to outline the Government's support in a concise and coherent way.

1. *What changes do you hope to see as a result of the development of AusAID's Civil Society Engagement Framework?*

a. *How will we know if the Framework is successful?*

The Australian Aid Program's support for civil society

Defining 'civil society'

AusAID's working definition of civil society is:

'the nexus between the state, the private sector and the family or household, where society debates and negotiates matters of common concern and organises to regulate public affairs. Civil society organisations include religious organisations, trades unions, community associations, non-government organisations, and social movements and networks.'

2. Does this definition reflect your understanding of civil society?

AusAID's objectives in working with civil society

AusAID has provisionally identified 3 main areas of interaction between the aid program and civil society:

1. **Policy Dialogue:** Contributing to policy, program and strategy development in Australia and overseas,
2. **Program Delivery:** Facilitating better access to basic service delivery and humanitarian activities for poor and vulnerable communities; strengthening the role and capacity of civil society in partner countries and supporting government systems to work better for the poor;
3. **Building Community Support:** Undertaking development awareness activities and advocating on international development issues; facilitating partnerships and promoting people to people and organisational links, including through volunteer and other programs.

3. Do these 3 areas broadly capture the interactions between the aid program and civil society?

a. Are there ways we can create more coherent links between them?

The role of civil society in promoting development effectiveness and harmonisation

Australia's endorsement of the Accra Action Agenda means that the Government has agreed to increasingly work in partnerships with and through developing country systems. Australia is exploring ways to minimise transaction costs on partner systems including through better aid predictability and alignment and coordination of our assistance through country-led strategies. The Accra Action Agenda also recognises the independent and complementary development roles that civil society organisations play within partner country systems and seeks to maximise their contributions to development. Regarding our engagement with civil society, putting the Accra Action Agenda into effect will broadly mean that:

- > AusAID includes civil society organisations in developing, delivering and monitoring development efforts and supports civil society in ways commensurate with their experience and capacity;
- > AusAID supports critical areas of interaction between partner governments and civil society in promoting effective development, and recognises their separate and complementary roles;
- > Civil society organisations focus on collaborative efforts and demonstrating effectiveness;
- > Civil society organisations from developed countries focus on partnering with, learning from, and building the capacity of, developing country civil society partners.

4. What are the most effective ways for AusAID to work with civil society in support of the Government's development objectives and those of our partner country governments?

a. What are the key comparative advantages of civil society that the government should draw on in delivering development assistance?

5. Are current consultation mechanisms adequate for providing civil society stakeholders opportunities to influence Australian aid policy and programming?

The principles underlying AusAID's engagement with civil society

AusAID is aiming to articulate principles to guide its engagement with civil society in Australia and overseas. The following principles have provisionally been identified to apply to civil society engagement:

- > **Respect:**
 - Recognise and respect the important contribution of civil society including volunteers
 - Respect the constraints and capacities of civil society and of the Australian aid program
 - Recognise that civil society and the Government are independent, although the relationship between them may be inter-dependent
- > **Inclusiveness:**
 - Support open communication and trusting relationships
 - Recognise the important role of advocacy by civil society
 - Involve beneficiaries to the maximum extent possible in design, implementation and evaluation
 - Promote an approach that seeks to include all people in a community and ensures the most vulnerable have equal access to and benefit from international development assistance
 - Do not exclude people based on religion, politics, gender, disability or ethnicity
 - Enhance gender equality
 - Be culturally appropriate and accessible
 - Respect and foster universally agreed human rights
- > **Diversity:**
 - Recognise that diversity in civil society is a strength which should be reflected in the aid program
 - Provide opportunity for diverse groups (including Indigenous Australians) to participate in, and influence development assistance
- > **Effectiveness:**
 - Focus on outcomes and results, and support continuous learning and improvement
 - Support innovation and good practice in civil society
 - Build on the knowledge of organisations, communities and individuals
 - Design interventions based on evidence-based policy and decision making
 - Adopt realistic timeframes and provide aid predictability to the extent possible
- > **Efficiency and accountability:**
 - Reflect coordination, cooperation and consistency with whole of government initiatives
 - Use streamlined procedures wherever possible
 - promote accountable and transparent financial management and reporting including independent audits, reviews and evaluations as appropriate
- > **Sustainability:**
 - Build partner countries' and civil society's capacity to maintain development benefits
 - Avoid creating dependency by ensuring beneficiaries' active contributions, participation and ownership in design, monitoring and evaluation
 - Ensure high quality analysis of the development and institutional context, and coordinate and collaborate with local institutions
- > **Sensitivity:**
 - Take account of the political, social and economic context in which we work
 - Prevent and protect children from harm and abuse
 - Integrate environmental considerations and mitigate against adverse environmental effects
 - Apply 'do no harm' guidelines
- > **Integrity:**
 - Do not promote proselytising
 - Mitigate against the vulnerability of not for profit organisations to exploitation by organised crime and terrorist organisations
 - Mitigate against wrongdoing or financial impropriety
- > **Partnerships:**
 - Be based on genuine, mutually respectful and accountable relationships
 - Promote partnerships and collaborative approaches to development challenges

6. Are these suitable principles for AusAID's Civil Society Framework? Are there others?

Measuring civil society's contribution to Australia's Aid Program

AusAID measures civil society's contribution to the aid program for three reasons -

1. **Management:** Reliable performance information assists managers to deliver against targeted results, to address problems promptly and to inform program and budget decisions.
2. **Learning:** Regular review of the aid program provides staff and partners with opportunities to learn more about aid effectiveness and performance management and implement improvements.
3. **Accountability:** Quality assurance systems provide reliable information on results to the Australian public, partners and poor people in developing countries.

AusAID's performance reporting tries to ensure:

- > **Clear objectives:** The objectives for the aid intervention are clear and practical so that success of the aid intervention can be measured;
- > **Transparency and Contestability:** Performance of the aid program is evidence-based, open, transparent, and can stand up to the external scrutiny of partners, beneficiaries and the Australian public;
- > **Partnerships:** Performance reports reflect feedback from, and are shared with, beneficiaries and major partners;
- > **Development and Aid effectiveness:** Monitoring and reporting aligns with partner country systems, relies on partners' own reporting frameworks where possible, and is informed by good development analysis including on cross sector issues like gender and the environment;
- > **Efficiency:** The effort invested in reporting is proportional to the value of the program and the context;
- > **Independent and self assessment:** AusAID employs a mix of independent and self assessment approaches depending on the context. Independent assessment is important to establish credibility with an external audience, while self-assessment provides rich information that assists ongoing learning, self reflection and ownership.

Recent AusAID, and other international analysis suggests that:

- > simple indicator-based monitoring assessments are often inadequate to capture the wider and more complex results of civil society organisation programs;
- > overall outcomes are difficult to aggregate in a meaningful way;
- > changes can only be understood in context and through gathering a range of stakeholder perspectives;
- > the innovative nature of many civil society organisation activities is not well captured by AusAID's current monitoring and evaluation systems;
- > successful civil society work requires longer timeframes and investments in local capacity.

In light of these issues, AusAID is interested in how we can best measure the performance of civil society in the aid program. In particular, AusAID is interested in how and when civil society stakeholders can be appropriately involved in AusAID's monitoring and evaluation process.

7. Are AusAID's current monitoring frameworks capturing the right information with regards to the effectiveness of civil society programs?

a. How could AusAID and civil society organisations work together to improve their monitoring and evaluation systems?